CORE
Metadata, citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk
Provided by Lancaster E-Prints

NR0902.qxd 9/13/05 12:05 PM Page 84

Perspective

Chronologies, Commonalities and Alternative Status in Japanese New Religious Movements

Defining NRMs outside the Western Cul-de-sac

Ian Reader

ABSTRACT: Through the example of the Japanese new religious movements (NRMs), this essay argues that studies of NRMs must move beyond their current Western-oriented framework if they are to have any validity in a global context. It argues that neither the perspective of Eileen Barker, in focusing on chronological newness, nor of J. Gordon Melton, in centering on outsider status, alone suffices to provide a framing definition of NRMs in Japan. One needs to combine the concept of newness (which should not be limited to mere first-generation notions) with the idea of being alternative. There is much value in extending a definition of NRMs to movements several generations old, for this enables the development of more nuanced understandings of NRM processes. The Japanese example indicates that one can identify a number of shared characteristics that enable discussion of a coherent category of movements known as NRMs. Such shared characteristics are more important than any links NRMs might have to older traditions with which they identify. NRMs are associated not only with newness, but also can be seen as possessing enduring themes shared by movements a century or more old and those of very recent origin.

Recent *Nova Religio* "Perspective" essays have discussed the problem of how to define "new religious movement." Eileen Barker, from a predominantly sociological perspective, focuses on the identification of common characteristics that she argues are associated

Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions, Volume 9, Issue 2, pages 84–96, ISSN 1092-6690 (print), 1541-8480 (electronic). © 2005 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, at www.ucpress.edu/journals/rights.htm.

NR0902.qxd 9/13/05 12:05 PM Page 85

with chronological newness. J. Gordon Melton, from a predominantly history of religions perspective, sees outsider status and tensions with the mainstream as a primary defining characteristic of NRMs. He also argues that NRMs may have more in common with the traditions from which they derive than with other NRMs; hence, he effectively rejects the idea that NRMs can be defined by a set of common shared characteristics. Thomas Robbins, picking up on themes in both essays, argues that chronology and outsider status should be conceptually separated in differentiating between "new" and "alternative."[1]

While Barker and Melton make some reference to non-Western contexts, their essays, perhaps unsurprisingly, focus largely on Western contexts. David Bromley's advocacy of a new field (new religions studies, NRS) speaks of the rise of NRMs in the context of Western history, and Melton uses a Western typology (church-sect-new religion) that does not translate readily into other (for example, Asian) contexts.[2] Yet, if the study of NRMs is to extend beyond the Western context, one needs to: 1) look equally closely at other geographical and cultural settings in which NRMs are found; 2) consider how NRMs may be defined and perceived in non-Western contexts; and 3) ask what lessons this might have for formulating broader understandings, concepts, and theoretical frameworks in the global context. As Asian colleagues remind us, the "West" is a minority population in a much wider world; hence, one should not assume that the West is necessarily the most appropriate arena within which to formulate theoretical models to apply to the rest of the world.

In this respect the example of Japan may be of value, because there one finds a widely used term, *shin shûkyô*, that is generally translated in English by the phrases "new religion" and "new religious movement,"[3] along with an academic field at least as well-developed as the study of NRMs in the West. Moreover, the study of NRMs has been embedded in the wider field of Religious Studies in Japan. Japanese scholars such as Shimazono Susumu and Inoue Nobutaka[4] have done historical research on nineteenth-century NRMs and produced sociologically based studies of more recent NRMs leading to a rather different approach to notions of chronological newness evident in, for example, Barker's essay.[5] The Japanese field presents examples of a large number of movements that academics classify as NRMs, many having considerable influence in Japan[6] and a sizeable segment of the population (estimated by some to be around 20 percent) that belongs or has belonged to them. Many NRMs in Japan have combined to form an organization, Shin Nihon Shûkyô Dantai Rengôkai (Shinshûren) or Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan,[7] to represent their interests. All this indicates how significant NRMs are in the Japanese religious landscape, raising questions about the extent to which this contradicts the seemingly marginalized situation of NRMs in the West. In Japan there are movements

NR0902.qxd 9/13/05 12:05 PM Page 86

scholars classify as "new" that are a century or more old as well as movements classed as "new" that have become linked to the centers of power. Hence, Japan offers an interesting context in which to look at Barker's definitional framework centering on the new, and Melton's emphasis on outsider or alternative status.

THE NEW AND THE ALTERNATIVE: DEFINITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

The term *shin shûkyô* emerged in post-war Japan, especially from the late 1950s on, as an alternative to an earlier, implicitly pejorative vocabulary. In the first half of the twentieth century, what academics and Japanese media now call *shin shûkyô* were widely referred to as either *ruiji shûkyô* (quasi-religions) or *jakyô* (false religions), and from the late 1940s *shinkô shûkyô* (newly arisen religions), an implicitly derogatory term implying transience, suddenness and lack of substance. The earlier, prejudicial language indicated the extent to which NRMs in Japan were depicted as ephemeral, marginal, outsider groups.[8] These movements stood in contrast to mainstream, established religions—Buddhism and Shinto—with documented, textual histories in Japan spanning more than a millennium and with normative elements in the social structure of Japanese religion, particularly in terms of rites of passage and social and household affiliations. It should be noted that Christianity is generally not perceived as an NRM or an outsider religion, even though it is effectively so in Japan; rather, it is viewed as "established" because of its associations with the Western mainstream.

The shift in terminology from "false" *(ruiji)* to "new" *(shin)* indicates that "new religions" *(shin shûkyô)* in recent decades have attained greater respectability in academia and the media, although *shin* retains nuances of alternative/outsider status, for in reality *shin shûkyô* stands in contrast to *kisei shûkyô* (established religions) of Shinto and Buddhism. This indicates that notions of alternative/outsider status are important in terms of conceptualizing and defining the "new."

While this underlines Melton's point about outsider status being a defining characteristic of NRMs, it does not obviate the importance of "newness" as a factor in defining NRMs in Japan. Being "new" is very much related to chronological frameworks, albeit ones linked not so much to first-generation membership but to broader historical concepts relating to the modern era in Japan. This period spans the 1868 Meiji Restoration to the present, an era whose origins are linked to the first half of the nineteenth-century when feudalism in the Tokugawa regime (1600–1868) was collapsing and a modern nation-state was emerging. From this period, NRMs as independent, doctrinally framed entities with their own infrastructures began to appear. Thus, in historical terms, NRMs in Japan have emerged outside of, and alternative to,

NR0902.qxd 9/13/05 12:05 PM Page 87

the mainstream, in conjunction with and in response to emergent modernity and the modern nation-state. The association with modernity is a defining indicator of the "new" in the context of Japanese NRMs. Japanese and Western scholars generally classify early nineteenth-century movements such as Konkôkyô, Kurozumikyô, and Tenrikyô as NRMs, just as they do late twentieth-century groups such as Mahikari, Agonshû, Kôfuku no Kagaku, and Shinnyo-en.[9]

On the surface, such classifications seem to suggest that Barker's emphasis on "being new" (i.e. first-generation membership) as a distinguishing characteristic of NRMs is problematic in Japan, and to an extent this is so. However, one should add the caveat that, in the Japanese historical context, "newness" is not limited to movements of just first- or second-generation adherents but, as cited above, relates to an association with modernity as well as with the comparative dimensions of historical experience. When viewed against the extensive backdrop of Japanese religious history, with its textually documented organizational structures dating back a millennium and a half, a 150-year-old religion such as Tenrikyô looks new compared to mainstream Buddhist sects such as Tendai or Shingon founded in the early ninth century. "Newness," in other words, can be a subjective concept that needs to be assessed within the historical culture in which it occurs. Japanese NRMs are identifiable as "new" because of their common emergence with modernity and in contrast to traditions with millennium-old organizational histories.

The "new" of "new religious movements" in Japan relates both to their chronologies and their alternative natures. Thus Robbins' argument for restricting NRM designation "*to groups that are actually organizationally and chronologically new*" (Robbins' emphasis), and for making a distinction between new religions and alternative religions (portrayed as movements "'misaligned' with dominant cultural and institutional patterns")[10] does not work in Japan, and may well be questionable in other cultures with similar conditions of modernity or historical patterns of religious formation.

Japanese movements identified as alternative or outside the mainstream are rarely able to amend that status, at least not without extended historical development. Rather, they continue to be seen as outsider groups even while seemingly becoming "established" as they age, developing multi-generational memberships, and even acquiring social or political power. This can be seen in Sôka Gakkai, which continues to be widely regarded with suspicion, contrary to Melton's comments that it is now "part of the religious establishment"[11] because of its association with a rising political party. Such suspicion was evident in the aftermath of the Aum affair when it was widely recognized that the 1996 revisions to the Religious Corporations Law, seemingly designed to guard against "future Aums," were primarily enacted with an eye to maintaining

NR0902.qxd 9/13/05 12:05 PM Page 88

control over Sôka Gakkai. Indeed, the very fact that Sôka Gakkai has a sizeable membership and has moved close to power centers may well have increased public disquiet. Sôka Gakkai provides evidence that NRMs can attain mass support and a political power base while retaining an aura of marginality in their public images.

Broad Categories, Generational Differences and Their Values

Japanese studies identify NRMs in Japan as a coherent group of movements emerging at different periods within the past 150 years and having variations within this broad category, in particular with regard to their different periods of formation. Also, regional variations relate to temporal periods; for example, nineteenth-century NRMs more commonly sprouted in rural, western Japan, whereas during the 1920s and 1930s NRMs emerged in urban Japan, especially Tokyo. While this focus on periods of formation might appear confusing, it provides scope for more nuanced understandings of NRM formation and development over time. By analyzing NRMs into generations and periods, Japanese scholars have: 1) recognized that NRMs should not be limited to chronologically new or first- (and perhaps second-) generation movements; 2) identified NRMs as a broad category with multiple, variegated factors such as era and region; and 3) created frameworks for developing greater understandings of processes that occur as chronologically "new" movements move forward from first-generation memberships and leaderships.

Conceptual Unities and Common Characteristics

Scholars of Japanese NRMs generally agree that these NRMs share common ground as alternative movements that emerged in the modern era, as well as a number of characteristics that, while not uniform or found in the same degree in every case, occur widely enough to serve as defining characteristics of NRMs in Japan. These involve structural and conceptual commonalities. In structural terms, in contrast with established traditions' emphasis on the role and status of ordained priests, NRMs in Japan are usually lay-centered movements with ordinary members empowered to act as proselytizing agents, which has promoted the rapid growth of many NRMs.

This emphasis on the laity departs from established hierarchical, ordained authority frameworks in Japan. NRM leadership patterns initially center not on office (i.e. priestly ordination), which typifies Buddhism and Shinto, but on charismatic self-selection by founders whose authority emerges from their ability to attract followers through spiritual healing, revelation of new teachings, and serving as intermediaries between the lay membership and spiritual realms. Since much

NR0902.qxd 9/13/05 12:05 PM Page 89

attention has been given to the study of charismatic leadership in Japan,[12] as elsewhere with regard to NRMs, I shall not comment further on this issue here, save to note that those interested in issues of the transmission and transference of charismatic authority after the demise of founders would find much of interest in the ways in which Japanese NRMs seek to ensure that such authority endures beyond the life of the founder. For instance, there are numerous examples of movements seeking to keep this power alive through affirming the deceased founder's continuing presence at sacred centers. Nakayama Miki of Tenrikyô is believed to remain present at Tenri and to oversee the movement. The spirit of Goi Masahisa of Byakkô Shinkôkai is channelled by his successor, Saionji Masami, into whom he descends to communicate with the faithful. The founder's revelatory teachings may be systematized into canonical writings bearing the leader's charismatic influence, and a mausoleum may become a sacred center of pilgrimage (e.g. Bentenshû and Ennokyô). Commonly, NRMs in Japan seek to retain charismatic leadership through familial succession, as in Risshô Kôseikai, Oomoto, and Shinnyo-en. When a suitable heir is not available in the blood family, a gifted disciple may be taken into the founder's household as a *yôshi* (adopted daughter or son), who then inherits leadership and passes it on within the family.

NRMs in Japan also create new sacred geographies through the building of holy centers imbued with cosmic significance, either linked to the founder or as a sign of new beginnings while restoring past spiritual glories. Thus Tenrikyô's sacred center is located where Nakayama Miki was born and founded her religion, where, according to Tenrikyô's cosmology, God the Parent created humanity, and where the nurturing nectar of heaven falls to Earth. Agonshû describes its sacred center at Yamashina near Kyoto as the "new Sahet Mahet" (the location in India of the first Buddhist monastery) where it will fulfill its proclaimed mission to restore original Buddhism and transform the world.[13]

Linked with such structural characteristics are a number of concepts that, as Helen Hardacre argues in her study of the Shinto-derived NRM Kurozumikyô, provide a unity to NRMs as a whole. Hardacre's analysis centers on Japanese NRMs' "vitalist, spiritualist worldview," the role of the individual in relation to the world, and the concept of self-cultivation as a means to control personal destiny.[14] Although Hardacre's analysis was based on one of the oldest of the Japanese NRMs, she argues that it can be used across the board with regard to Japanese NRMs, a point with which I readily agree. Late twentieth-century movements manifest similar orientations. Agonshû, for example, highlights the individual's relation to illness, karma, the ancestors, and world problems, and emphasizes personal cultivation via spiritual practices to "cut one's karma," be freed from spiritual hindrances, and attain salvation.[15] Other scholars replicate Hardacre's conceptual unity argument, even if they do not use

NR0902.qxd 9/13/05 12:05 PM Page 90

the same individual/self framework and terminology. Thus, Shimazono Susumu and Yumiyama Tatsuya both identify a vitalist, spiritualist worldview that affirms individual, this-worldly salvation as a defining characteristic of Japanese NRMs.[16]

The focus on this-worldly salvation, which places the individual at the nexus of spiritual and physical forces, is grounded in an outlook in which the spiritual world (especially ancestral spirits) may influence the physical world. Such intervention may be malevolent (unhappy spirits causing misfortunes such as illness) or benevolent (protective spirits helping the living attain success and happiness), but it invariably revolves around notions of karma, morality, and techniques to eradicate the malevolent or promote the benevolent. Karma, a notion derived from Buddhism but common in Japanese NRMs, includes individual responsibility for life status and the importance of moral behavior towards others and one's ancestors (who must be cared for after death to remain benevolent overseers of individual and familial fortunes). Representative in this respect is Agonshû's insistence that misfortune results from neglect of the spirits of the dead.[17]

Japanese NRMs also provide a means of eradicating misfortune and ensuring individual salvation by advocating spiritual techniques, e.g., Mahikari's *okiyome* (spiritual purification through the raising of hands), or Agonshû's use of Buddhist-style rituals designed to placate and purify unhappy spirits, thereby eradicating spiritual pollutions or transforming spirits into protectors.[18] This magical orientation goes hand-in-hand with an emphasis on morality, founded in Buddhist and Confucian ethics, as the basis of social thought in Japan. Rituals are underpinned by the recognition of one's moral duty to care for spirits of the dead and to behave in appropriate ways, because what one does to others can return to affect oneself and one's kin, a concept Hardacre identifies as the notion that "other people are mirrors."[19] Techniques and morality in the form of correct behavior are parts of the same dynamic.[20]

Individual transformation, salvation, and liberation from negative influences comprise a common Japanese NRM vision of the world as needing imminent spiritual transformation. Indeed, Japanese NRMs as a whole have been characterized by millennial orientations ranging from *yonaoshi* (world renewal) affirmed by nineteenth-century NRMs such as Oomoto, to spiritual action intended to move the present material-based world into a new spiritual realm, to Aum Shinrikyô's more aggressive millennialism that ended in violence. Such visions have tended to become less militant over time. Oomoto and Tenrikyô are examples of movements whose millennial pronouncements in their early days implied a radical transformation of the political, social, and material order, but which have moved away from such overt radicalism even while continuing to affirm hope in this-worldly spiritual transformation. Because of Aum's activities, more recent movements have downplayed their

NR0902.qxd 9/13/05 12:05 PM Page 91

millennial visions, although others—notably Kenshôkai, a Nichiren Buddhism-derived NRM that has grown rapidly in recent years—continue to articulate dramatic millennial visions central to NRMs in Japan.[21]

Integral to visions of individual and world transformation and the centrality of charismatic founders is the recurrent theme of restoring original truths to the world. Japanese NRMs are "new" in positing alternatives to the existing order, but they rarely claim that their messages are new in terms of never before manifesting in this world. They claim to represent truths in new forms, for instance by affirming the return of a founder deity who reveals truths to a charismatic founder in order to restore original order in a world corrupted by human misdeeds. This theme marks numerous Shinto-derived NRMs such as Tenrikyô and Oomoto. Also, it is found in NRMs such as Agonshû and Shinnyo-en that claim Buddhist origins and assert that inspirational founders, through their readings of Buddhist texts (in Shinnyo-en, the Mahaparinirvana Sutra, in Agonshû the Agamas), have been able to unlock ancient meanings lost to earlier generations. Japanese NRMs in effect fuse their newness with claims to represent religious truths emanating from time immemorial.

Characteristics, Newness and Lineages of Provenance

I have given a generalized, all-too-brief outline of the main characteristics whose commonality enables one to view Japanese NRMs as a coherent category. In these characteristics one can discern some resemblance (notably in structural terms) to those outlined by Eileen Barker. There are, however, some differences. For example, Barker's argument that NRM membership "is unlikely to reflect the general population"[22] may not be viable in Japan because of the large number of people who have joined NRMs and because, as various studies indicate, NRM members tend to vary little, if at all, from national norms and may well be (as Tani Fumio has commented in his study of Mahikari) "average Japanese."[23]

I depart from Barker in two major respects. One is that she emphasizes characteristics based on sociological and structural factors, whereas in the case of Japanese NRMs I place more emphasis on shared conceptual characteristics, such as providing an alternative or new vision of an individual's place in the world. Such characteristics are more crucial than sociological factors such as atypical membership, which appears not to hold true in Japan to the degree that Barker suggests it does in other cultural contexts.

Perhaps more critically, I disagree with Barker's view that shared characteristics are as they are "merely because they are new."[24] Rather than being "new," many of the defining characteristics that mark Japanese NRMs relate to being alternative, e.g., their focus on laity and self-selected charismatic leadership in contrast to the priestly hierarchies

NR0902.qxd 9/13/05 12:05 PM Page 92

of the established religions. Their central unifying concepts relate to the proclamation of new truths and messages of vitalistic salvation. Japanese NRMs that emerged in the nineteenth century still proclaim their mission to transmit new truths and continue to manifest common NRM characteristics such as the focus on individual salvation and world renewal. Especially when one considers their conceptual unities, the link between common characteristics is not something presaged solely upon chronological newness.

Despite this disagreement with Barker, I remain convinced that her approach of looking at commonalities remains a viable means of classifying NRMs. Like Barker, I take issue with Melton's argument that NRMs tend to have more in common with the traditions from which they emerge than with each other. In Japan, as Melton has observed, there has been plentiful discussion about these traditions, and one can easily discern lineages of NRMs that point to their provenance: as with their generational variegations, Japanese NRMs manifest a host of derivations, some associated primarily with Buddhism (e.g., Sôka Gakkai, Agonshû), others classified as Shinto-lineage (e.g., Tenrikyô), and still others as folk-derived (e.g., Mahikari, also seen as having Shinto connections).

However, one needs to be cautious about emphasizing lineages of provenance over the conceptual unities and common characteristics outlined above. It is important, for example, to emphasize that the lineage derivation of Japanese NRMs centers to a great degree on ritual formats and types of textual authority. Thus, Agonshû is a Buddhist NRM because it uses Buddhist sutras and ritual practices, and has statues and Buddhist-style altars in its religious centers; Tenrikyô is a Shinto-lineage NRM primarily because of its ritual practices and modes of worship; and Mahikari is folk-derived because of the folk origins of its healing practices. To complicate matters further, one can make more nuanced lineage distinctions because of fissiparous tendencies in Japanese NRMs. For example Tenrikyô, Oomoto, and Sekai Kyûseikyô have suffered secessions spawning further NRMs.

However, this does not mean that a NRM with, for example, Buddhist orientation such as Agonshû *necessarily* has more in common with the Buddhist tradition than with NRMs whose ritual patterns derive from Shinto or the folk tradition. Established Buddhist groups tend to emphasize differences between themselves and Agonshû, and to draw attention to apparent disjunctions between traditional Buddhist teachings and Agonshû's somewhat inventive claims to manifest "original Buddhism" *(genshi Bukkyô)* through interpretations of early Buddhist texts in ways that infuse them with folk beliefs relating to the spirits of the dead.[25] Agonshû may proclaim that beliefs surrounding such spirits and the causes of misfortune are "original Buddhism," but in reality they share more common ground with Shinto- and folk-derived NRMs

NR0902.qxd 9/13/05 12:05 PM Page 93

(e.g., Mahikari) than orthodox Buddhist teachings. Mahikari and Agonshû have different derivations, but this is less significant than the similarities of their conceptual worldviews. Indeed, after having spent time at centers of both religions and observed comparable practices (e.g., modes of counseling people claiming to suffer misfortunes), I find it much easier to see them both as NRMs with common conceptual characteristics, than to see linkages between Agonshû and established Buddhist sects. As noted earlier, there is a continuum in temporal terms between Japanese NRMs from Tenrikyô to recently emerging NRMs, and a continuum in their conceptual and defining characteristics as NRMs. It is more useful, when considering Japanese NRMs, to look at their similarities rather than focusing on their lineages.

CONCLUSION

I have suggested that one can develop definitional frameworks for NRMs in Japan centered around their "newness" in terms of their historical development in conjunction with the continuing processes of modernity, and in terms of their public perception as "alternative" and "outsider" movements, and through their contradistinction to established mainstream traditions. I have indicated that they share common characteristics in terms of structures and concepts that are helpful identifying markers of their nature as NRMs. In such contexts, one can appropriately study and classify an "old" NRM such as Tenrikyô within the same broad category as late twentieth-century Japanese NRMs. While being alternative is an indicator of being an NRM, being chronologically new need not be. Movements can be fourth-generation and a century old yet "new" in terms of history and characteristics. Indeed, by having a flexible notion of history that recognizes a wider concept of NRMs as a coherent set of movements emerging within a broad but cohesive historical framework spanning several generations, and by examining, as Japanese scholars have, how different periods and fluctuating social conditions within that broader framework have affected existing NRMs while giving rise to other waves and types, one can develop a more comprehensive and sophisticated understanding of the patterns and processes through which NRMs emerge, develop, and evolve over time.

While I therefore argue that focusing on the chronologically new is highly problematic, I emphasize that the Japanese case indicates that one should not get trapped into making artificial and unworkable differentiations between the new and the alternative. Equally, it would appear problematic to emphasize the alternative as the defining feature of NRMs without examining what might link such movements in other ways, for example structurally or, as I have shown with Japanese NRMs, conceptually. Of course, I recognize that while the Japanese case

NR0902.qxd 9/13/05 12:05 PM Page 94

provides a good example through which to develop broader studies, one cannot see it or indeed any particular regionally or culturally bound set of NRMs as the norm. The Japanese case reminds us that it is no bad thing for scholars to realize that what pertains to modern Western cultural settings may not always be replicated in other contexts. This is not only a reminder that Western models are not universal (and hence cannot be assumed to be the sole basis for the formation of disciplinary structures of study (but it is also, in reverse, a reminder to those who get immersed in studying other cultures (e.g., Japan) that what they assume to be normative may not translate as such in other contexts.

This point needs to be taken on board if a designated field of study (Bromley's NRS) is to develop in ways that do not merely replicate methodological biases and cultural orientations that typified early Western-centric development of Religious Studies. It is critical to nurture awareness of ways in which NRMs in Japan, and Africa, Latin America, other parts of Asia, and so on are conceived and defined, and to avoid assuming that what works in Western contexts can be applied equally elsewhere. It is also important, if Bromley's vision materializes, to take note from the Japanese case of the importance of historical vision and observing movements over relatively extended periods. Although Bromley speaks of studying NRMs as they "are in the process of developing,"[26] there is much to be learned from continuing to study NRMs even when they attain chronological maturity, and especially if, because they stand in contradistinction to the mainstream and share commonalities with newer movements, they remain perceived as NRMs in their own cultural settings.

ENDNOTES

[1] J. Gordon Melton, "Toward a Definition of 'New Religion,'" *Nova Religio* 8, no. 1 (July 2004): 73–87; Eileen Barker, "What Are We Studying? A Sociological Case for Keeping the '*Nova*,'" *Nova Religio* 8, no. 1 (July 2004): 88–102; and Thomas Robbins, "New Religions and Alternative Religions," *Nova Religio* 8, no. 3 (March 2005): 104–11.

[2] David Bromley, "Whither New Religions Studies: Defining and Shaping a New Area of Study," *Nova Religio* 8, no. 2 (November 2004): 83–97; Melton, "Toward a Definition of 'New Religion,'" 79–80. The problems of this typology become evident when, discussing Japan, Melton identifies Shin Buddhism as an example of a *church* or established religious body, when in fact it is a *school* within a larger tradition (Buddhism), which is subdivided into a number of sectarian organizations. In Japanese contexts, historians of religion have normally used *sect* as a translation of *shû*, commonly used to identify branches within the wider tradition of Buddhism. In this context, Shin Buddhism (Jôdo Shinshû) is a sect of Buddhism. My point is not to confuse issues but to stress the need for care when applying Western-derived concepts to other contexts where they might not work as well.

NR0902.qxd 9/13/05 12:05 PM Page 95

[3] Japanese nouns remain unchanged and can be singular or plural, depending on context.

[4] Japanese names are given in Japanese order (family name followed by given name).

[5] For a discussion of Japanese studies of NRMs see Trevor Astley, "New Religions," in *The Nanzan Guide to Japanese Religions*, ed. Paul L. Swanson and Clark Chilson (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, in press).

[6] Sôka Gakkai's influence, especially through its connection to the political party Kômeitô, is well known, but other NRMs, notably Risshô Kôseikai (with strong links to political figures who support its peace policies) also have good political connections and influences behind the scenes.

[7] Not all NRMs are members of this body. Sôka Gakkai is conspicuous by its absence, as are many newer NRMs. Further information on the Shinshûren, including a list of participating NRMs, is available at <http://www.shinshuren.or.jp/english/>, accessed 29 May 2005.

[8] In his essay Melton commented on the role of established religions in the West in fomenting anti-NRM sentiments, noting the little academic attention paid to this topic. The Japanese case would support his view; there is evidence that adherents and academics of mainstream traditions, notably Buddhism, were active in fostering perceptions of NRMs as outsider or deviant groups, a point George J. Tanabe, Jr., and I touch upon in *Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), 2–3. This is an area that requires further research.

[9] Standard Japanese reference works on NRMs, notably the comprehensive encyclopedia by INOUE Nobutaka, KÔMOTO Mitsugu, TSUSHIMA Michihito, NAKAMAKI Hirochika, and NISHIYAMA Shigeru, eds., *Shinshûkyô jiten (Encyclopaedia of New Religions)* (Tokyo: Kôbundô, 1990), incorporate all these movements within the rubric of NRMs.

[10] Robbins, "New Religions and Alternative Religions," 106, 108.

[11] Melton, "Towards a Definition of 'New Religion,'" 79.

[12] Probably the best study in this context is Shûkyô Shakaigaku Kenkyû Kai, ed., *Kyôso to sono shuhen (Religious Founders and Their Environments)* (Tokyo: Yûzankaku, 1987).

[13] For further discussion, see Ian Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), 215.

[14] Helen Hardacre, *Kurozumikyô and the New Religions of Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1986) 11–21, 188.

[15] Ian Reader, "The Rise of a Japanese 'New' New Religion: Themes in the Development of Agonshû," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 15, no. 4 (1988): 235–61.

[16] SHIMAZONO Susumu, *From Spirituality to Salvation: Popular Religious Movements in Modern Japan* (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2004); YUMIYAMA Tatsuya, "The Vitalistic Concept of Salvation and Japanese New Religions," *Religion and Society*, Special Issue: Records of the 2002 Annual Conference of the Japanese Association for the Study of Religion and Society (2004): 55–67.

[17] Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, 209–11

NR0902.qxd 9/13/05 12:05 PM Page 96

[18] See Winston Davis' discussion of Mahikari in *Dojo: Magic and Exorcism in Modern Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980), and my discussion of Agonshû in *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, 221–27.

[19] Hardacre, *Kurozumikyô*, 22–23

[20] In this context, Japanese scholars have developed important critiques of Max Weber's argument that in modernity's advance magic will be replaced by morality. As SHIMAZONO Susumu has shown in *Gendai kyûsai shûkyôron) (The Study of Contemporary Salvationist Religions)* (Tokyo: Seikyûsha, 1992), the Weberian argument fails in the context of Japanese NRMs, which have combined the two.

[21] YUMIYAMA, "The Vitalistic Concept of Salvation," 62–63.

[22] Barker, "What Are We Studying?" 96.

[23] TANI Fumio, "Shinpi jara shûkyô e" ("From Mystery to Religion"), in *Gendai no kokoro: Sûkyô Mahikari (The Mind of the Modern World: Sûkyô Mahikari)*, ed. HATAKENAKA Sachiko (Tokyo: Obundô, 1987), 107–16.

[24] Barker, "What Are We Studying?" 88.

[25] I base these comments on a number of discussions with officials and academics associated with the Sôtô Zen and Shingon sects during the 1980s and early 1990s when I was researching Agonshû. For further discussion of Agonshû's links with, and disjunctures from, the Buddhist tradition, see Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, 211–12.

[26] Bromley, "Whither New Religions Studies," 83.